



Background to the Regional Collaborative Framework



**Enhancing Queensland's local government
biosecurity capacity**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries proudly acknowledges all First Nations peoples (Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders) and the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the country on which we live and work. We acknowledge their continuing connection to land, waters and culture and commit to ongoing reconciliation. We pay our respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.

Cover page:
Behana Gorge, Yidindji Country, Far North Queensland (FNQ Silhouette).
Aurukun, Northern Cape Peninsula, Far North Queensland

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1. Purpose

This document provides the background to the development of the Regional Collaborative Framework. This document is to be read alongside the framework as it provides supporting information that will benefit development of successful collaborative partnerships.

2. Introduction

Effective **biosecurity** practices are critical to ensuring that Queensland, its people, and its environments, are protected from the worst impacts of invasive species. However, this is not something that can be achieved in isolation. Weeds and pest animals do not adhere to local government or state boundaries and similar issues across regions mean that significant benefits can be achieved through working together. In recognition of this, cooperation, coordination, and collaboration are things that we all strive for.

The first guiding principle of the *Queensland Invasive Plants and Animals Strategy 2019-2024* highlights that the most effective management approach involves integration, collaboration and coordination. Through the enhancement of working partnerships, the aim is to facilitate continuous and long-term commitments from stakeholders that alleviate constraints through shared data, resources, knowledge and experiences.

In Queensland, we have a long history of local and state governments working jointly, with the aim of minimising the impact invasive plants and animals have on our environment, economy and society. However, to achieve improved outcomes, true collaborative arrangements must be established that involve the full range of government, industry and community partners which reach beyond the geographic bounds of individual local government areas. Many local governments are already working actively towards this objective. This document aims to bring together the learnings from research literature and the Better Partnerships Project that developed the Regional Collaborative Framework.

Queensland has experienced many new exotic and emerging biosecurity threats over recent years. A 2015 review on the capacity of Biosecurity Queensland (BQ) to address existing and new threats highlighted the challenge of responding to the growing scale and scope of this work (Brooks, Glanville & Kompas, 2015, pp.12). One of its key recommendations highlighted that enhanced biosecurity capacity can result from building stronger and more effective working relationships among governments, organisations, and communities at the regional level.

The Better Partnerships Project (BPP) was subsequently established to identify best practice approaches to regional partnerships for managing invasive plants and animals in Queensland. The project was flexible in design to allow arrangements to be tailored to the specific needs of the regions. The outcomes of the BPP demonstrated that a collective approach to regional pest management enabled stakeholders to best meet their biosecurity objectives and outcomes.

This document provides the key learnings from the BPP that have been distilled into the Regional Collaborative Framework to support organisations in establishing effective regional partnerships for managing invasive plants and animals in Queensland.

3. Types and levels of engagement

Different levels of engagement are suitable in different circumstances. These sit on an engagement continuum that is often broken into three categories: cooperation, coordination, and collaboration. A summary of the key features of each is provided in Table 1 below.

Any form of engagement provides valuable support for the management of invasive plants and animals, however, the further you move to the right on the continuum, the greater the potential benefits in terms of shared responsibility, shared knowledge and (in some instances) more efficient use of resources. The trade-off is that effective collaboration – to the far right of the continuum, can be complex and requires significant levels of investment (both time and resources). Consequently, it is important to understand when there is value in striving for collaboration and how to get the most from your collaborative efforts.

COOPERATION	COORDINATION	COLLABORATION
Lower Intensity/Informal		Higher Intensity/Formal
Shorter-term, informal relationships	Longer-term effort around a project or task	More durable and pervasive relationships
Loose connections and low trust	Medium connections, work-based trust	Dense interdependent connections, high trust
Some shared information	Some planning and division of roles	Commitment to common goals and participatory decision making
Ad hoc communication flows	Structured project-based communication flows	Frequent communication
Power remains with individual organisations	Power remains with parent organisations	Power is shared between organisations
Separate goals, resources, and structures	Some shared resources, rewards, and risks	New structure/systems change – shared leadership, rewards, and risks
Adaption to or accommodation of other's actions and goals	Joint policies, programs and aligned resources	Collective resourcing of negotiated shared goals
Commitment and accountability to own organisation	Commitment and accountability to parent organisation and project	Commitment and accountability to collaboration first
Results in: Associations, networks	Results in: Coalitions, project teams	Results in: Joint ventures

Table 1 – Engagement continuum (adapted from Gray, 1989)

4. When is collaboration useful?

Collaboration is the activity of working with another person, entity, or group to create or achieve something together and can be used as a powerful tool to tackle big challenges and reach objectives that simply could not be achieved by solo efforts. Collaboration used effectively will see an inclusive engagement process with joint planning and formalised mechanisms to support cross boundary operations (Smart 2017; Carey and Crammond 2015; O'Flynn 2014).

So, when is collaboration useful?

Collaboration is seen as essential for dealing with 'wicked problems' (Scott and Bardach, 2018). Wicked problems are difficult to define because they are very complex. They may have any or all of the following

- Lots of people involved with widely varying opinions,
- Come with knowledge gaps
- Interconnected with other problems
- contradictory or changing requirements
- require solutions that depend on achieving community behaviour change

Many invasive species management programs can be defined as wicked problems. They are complex, require community-wide, cross-jurisdictional responses, and are affected by a diversity of confounding variables that can make or break the management effort. In this instance, collaborations defined by trust, power sharing relationships and frequent communication are extremely valuable. Collaborations may not be essential for smaller, more focussed projects, but they do provide an excellent framework to tackle the larger issues and to provide support for strong regional biosecurity responses.

5. Benefits of regional collaboration

The principles of collaboration can be applied at almost any scale, with effective collaborations potentially delivering greater access to resources (human, financial, technical), knowledge, skills and experience with participatory decision making.

The scale of the collaboration should reflect the type and extent of the biosecurity risk that is being managed and be based on an assessment of whether efficiencies can really be achieved by combining resources and effort. At a regional scale it is important to identify the big-ticket issues that are common across regions, and which will support better decision making and more efficient use of resources.

According to the outcomes of the BPP, these include:

- Projects requiring spatial coordination e.g. surveillance and response actions.
- Projects that can deliver more efficiently at the regional scale e.g. communications, monitoring and evaluation, industry engagement.
- Projects that make best use of collective skills and resources in the region e.g. particular control techniques.

In addition, it's important to ensure that regional collaborations add value to, and do not compete with core local government land protection roles.

Participants in the BPP also reported that they valued the collaboration, particularly for sharing knowledge and learning, but also for building new networks and collaborative

projects. Through these projects, regional collaboration also provided a mechanism to collaborate on new and innovative approaches that individual local governments could not achieve on their own (Eberhard, R, Estrada-Grajales, C & Vella, K 2020).

6. What do effective collaborations rely on?

Collaborations rely on the establishment of strong and trusting relationships, where partners work as a team to achieve shared objectives, regardless of organisational differences and hierarchies. According to the authors of the BPP report, it's important to ensure that stakeholders have the capacity, organisation, status and resources to participate in a collaborative endeavour.

Ideally, governance and engagement activities that underpin a collaborative effort should promote a culture of respect for every view, put participants on equal footing, and create an atmosphere of trust through transparency in decision making and by ensuring mutual benefit (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Core requirements of collaborative relationships

Key principles for regional biosecurity collaborations

The following principles for biosecurity collaborations have been developed based on the experience of the BPP pilot, the research literature on collaboration and the experience of other regional collaborations in Queensland.

Regional collaborations need to be fit for purpose

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to collaboration. The issues, participants, collaborative and governance arrangements cannot be standardised and must be driven by local needs, shared objectives and ideologies. They must be tailored based on the features of regional landscapes, land use, communities and stakeholders.

Strong collaborations can be built on a small number of shared objectives

The most value can be achieved from focussing on the commonalities, not the differences, even if this narrows the focus of the collaborative effort. Regional collaboration can add value to local government biosecurity capacity by facilitating regional biosecurity plans and actions that focus on a few key shared issues. These can be distinct from but should be complimentary to local government biosecurity plans and efforts.

There is significant value in developing regional biosecurity plans

The results of the BPP indicated that a strong, jointly agreed regional biosecurity plan was a critical requirement for the success of a regional biosecurity collaboration. Developing or revising regional biosecurity plans provides an opportunity to update knowledge and improve and align decision-making processes across local governments. The benefits to participants in regional collaborations include sharing knowledge and information, collaborative relationships, planning and on-ground projects. Vitality, it also provides a jointly developed and formalised agreement on the priorities for the collaboration.

Regional coordinator roles provide critical capacity for regional collaboration

Smaller scale collaboration can be achieved in the absence of a coordinator, but experience suggests that having a dedicated coordinator or facilitator to help bring parties together and establish the governance arrangements that form the foundation of a good collaborative arrangement is extremely valuable when working at a regional scale. Coordinators can also play a key liaison role with multiple stakeholders, as well as organising and collating information and data for communication and dissemination across the network.

Equity between partners is important

Unequal knowledge, capacity, and power can make collaboration difficult, and collaboration efforts can reinforce inequalities if not carefully managed. While it is not possible to have everyone enter a collaboration on equal footing, it is important to establish (and even formalise) systems that value the different things that partners bring to the table.

Funding arrangements should be flexible and non-competitive

Flexible and on-going funding arrangements can enable regional collaborations to identify and rapidly respond to regional priorities, while competitive and short-term funding arrangements undermine collaborative efforts. Therefore, while an external boost of funding might kick-start a collaboration, the collaborative arrangements should consider how pooled resources can be used to collaboratively address regional priorities.

Formal support from higher-level decision makers is critical

Operational collaborations need to have effective connections to higher-level decision-makers (CEOs, mayors) to allow collaborative initiatives to be formally supported and recognised for their achievements. This will help encourage on-going support.

Hierarchies should be avoided

Hierarchical models of leadership and communication don't support the development of trust and open dialogue. If possible, collaborative arrangements should be facilitated by a neutral party and governance arrangements should support equality in membership between core partners.

Priorities must be shared

Priorities, objectives and outcomes must be formally established and agreed upon by all partners. A collaboration is only effective if there is mutual benefit and trust underpinning the arrangement.

Capabilities/limitations should be understood and accepted

In some instances, depending on resourcing and/or existing relationships, it may be important to start small and build over time. To ensure success, set realistic goals that are within everyone's capability to deliver. Often starting with a few collaborative activities will help build the trusting relationships required to sustain and build on the relationship over time.

It's also important to ensure the proposed regional collaboration will add value to local biosecurity operations (which often operate with significant capacity constraints). Therefore, the benefits of participating must outweigh the costs of putting extra burden on already stretched staff.

Good practice involves open and frequent communication

Effective communication to support collaborations includes negotiating in good faith, providing frequent updates and discussion that actively shares information in an atmosphere that encourages listening, understanding, discussion and joint decision-making.

Clear guidelines / rules of engagement must be jointly established at the beginning to support a trust-based partnership

These governance arrangements should include processes for decision-making, equal participation, connected decision making and agreements on roles, rights and responsibilities for all participants.

7. Regional biosecurity planning

As highlighted above, good governance underpins effective collaborative arrangements. To support this, it is important to ensure a shared understanding of regional priorities that will provide mutual benefit to partners.

The development or revision of regional biosecurity plans in partnership with all collaborators is one mechanism that can be used to align the decision-making processes and support the development of operational plans at the local and regional level.

At the local government level, Local Government Biosecurity Plans provide guidance on how the general biosecurity obligation can be applied to invasive plants and animals at the local government scale. They provide information on the invasive species that are considered a priority in the local government area and what the expected management outcomes are (e.g., eradication, containment or asset protection). This makes it possible to determine what the reasonable and practical measures are for the management of invasive plants and animals at a property scale.

As such, Local Government Biosecurity Plans are critical documents because they provide scope for the establishment of priorities based on local circumstances, set the strategic direction for local government operational planning and provide the community with a clear understanding of what they must do to fulfill their GBO with regard to invasive plants and animals. Within local government areas, they can form the foundation for collaborative relationships if they have been developed cooperatively so that they address and support the needs of key stakeholders.

However, Local Government Biosecurity Plans provide limited value for regional collaboration because, by definition, they address the local government priorities for which they are developed. In the best circumstances they are designed in consultation with

neighbouring local governments to ensure that border issues are managed, and some coordination of activities can be achieved.

Regional biosecurity plans are generally seen as the solution to managing broader biosecurity issues that are common to multiple local government areas. These are usually developed cooperatively by multiple stakeholders and can establish a bridge between different biosecurity planning and operational approaches.

While not critical to establishing effective collaborative relationships, a formalised and regionally supported plan sets a strong foundation for the type of trusting and transparent relationship that must be sustained to support collaborative activities.

As noted earlier, regional collaborations should add value to, not compete with, core local government land protection roles. Therefore, care must be taken to ensure that regional biosecurity plans are complementary to local government biosecurity plans.

8. Multicultural collaborative principles

Queensland is home to people from a diversity of cultural backgrounds, including a large number of indigenous groups, each with their own culture, customs, language, and laws. The term Country is often used by Aboriginal peoples to describe the lands, waterways, and seas to which they are culturally connected. It contains complex ideas about law, place, custom, language, spiritual belief, cultural practice, material sustenance, family, and identity ([Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies](#)).

If you have ever been on a team before, you will know it's not always second nature to work together as a cohesive group of individuals. When you consider some of the inherent characteristics of people such as their age, gender, cultural/traditional beliefs, language, education level, ability/disability and worldviews, it quickly becomes apparent that what you consider to be familiar and normal may not be the same for another person.

Often, the noticeable strengths and efficiencies of collaboration arise over time when important factors like 'trust' and 'confidence' develop among the group.



Cultural awareness

Be conscious of the cultural differences that may exist within the group.

Individuals should be aware of cultural differences and show that they are open and willing to learn and be mindful of inherent sensitivities that arise when interacting in cross-cultural scenarios.

Indigenous Australians have the longest continuous relationship with their traditional and custodial country (land and sea). Torres Strait Islanders have 'Ailan Kustom' (island custom) and Aboriginal people have their 'Lore' that has sustained the native environment over millennia, giving rise to their cultural practices, nourishing their spiritual identity, and facilitating a deep connection with country.

This long and intimate relationship with Country has developed Traditional Environmental Knowledge (TEK) to govern and promote sustainable methods of environmental protection.

Assumptions and stereotypes

Refrain from making assumptions and stereotyping individuals within the group.

Every participant has unique experiences and knowledge that they have attained and developed throughout their lives. It is important to understand that individuals and organisations have characteristics and experiences that influence how they interact with one another.

Participants should express to the group the best method for working effectively with them. It is important that members highlight things like:

- Suitable working arrangements
- What obligations or commitments they may have outside of the collaborative group,
- Identifying what can be expected of them or the organisation.

Non-verbal communication

Use non-verbal communication where possible to achieve clarity

If the collaborative group has multiple language speaking or hearing-impaired members, this presents the risk for information to be misunderstood. Non-verbal communication can mitigate any potential confusions or misinterpretation of information and objectives.

Effective non-verbal communication and visual aids could include:

- Images
- Charts and Graphs
- Demonstrations
- Videos

Utilise active listening

Employ active listening techniques to boost understanding among the collaboration.

Active listening is a skill used to best absorb the full extent of the information being presented/ explained to an individual. As the name suggests, it means being attentive and

engaged when someone is speaking to ensure that the intention of the message was received.

It can be helpful to:

- Re-iterate another group members explanation of a scenario, a question or request in your own words.
- Refrain from interrupting the speaker until they have finished then ask questions and get clarity

9. Assessing collaborative outcomes

Collaborative outcomes can be assessed based on:

- Quality of collaborative products. These can be considered to be of high quality if:
 - Goals and objectives are specific
 - Plans and documents explain the collaborative approach and process
 - Plans and strategies are supported by a high-quality knowledge base and/or a system for further research and information gathering
 - Strategies that are resourced, with clearly delineated responsibilities for actions to achieve agreed upon goals.
- Sustainability of collaborative initiatives, which is supported by sufficient funds, staff materials and time, invested over a sufficient period. Other determinants that predict an enduring collaboration include:
 - Effective leadership
 - Stable staffing and participation
 - Technical information, data, and scientific support
 - Ongoing commitment by stakeholder organisations
 - External pressure that encourages ongoing collaboration.

10. Summary

The Regional Collaborative Framework was based on the knowledge gained through a literature review and the BPP. The information in this document supports the framework and can be used as a reference guide as local governments step their way through developing collaborative partnerships to enhance the management of regional invasive plants and animals.

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